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Pete W. Cole  
Investigator.  
December 20, 1937.

An interview with Nancy Folsom  
Near Lane, Oklahoma

#### DANCES AND CHOCTAW COURTSHIP

Nancy Folsom is a Choctaw full-blood Indian woman, an elderly lady, aged 65.

I am a native of Oklahoma, born and reared in this country and have lived nearly all of my life in this county. I cannot give much information on history or relate any event or happenings of the past but I do remember some incidents or traditions of the aged people that were often told us when we were small. One of the pleasures that my race of people enjoyed was dancing.

They had several different kinds of dances, some were considered insignificant and common happenings so that not enough attention was paid to them to deserve notice here. There were others that were considered important and were nation-wide or rather national, such as the Ball Play dance, War dance, Eagle dance and Scalp dance, all of which seem to have been a result of rude and savage ideas.

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The parent or father of the boys taught the young braves three things, namely: war, hunting and ball playing. In training for war the young men were required to go through much practice, hardships and suffering. They were required to stand much infliction of torture on their naked bodies. At least once a year, take a plunge into a deep water and dive into water four times in one minute for four mornings in succession. On the first morning the brave took four dips; three dips the second morning; two dips the third morning; and one dip on the fourth morning, after which came the subject of lectures on bravery, sincerity, truth and justice toward their friends. Usually these lectures were given by the bravest of the head men and no other person was allowed to address the young braves. They were also trained in correct use and handling of bows and arrows and received their expert and perfect practice in killing deer or turkey. It was said that they hardly ever missed a deer or turkey at a distance of fifty yards.

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The girls had their part of the work as well as the young braves and were trained up to perform various kinds of work that was taught them. They took no small degree of pride in the latter, viewing it as a proper sphere for their exertions. The women would ridicule and laugh at the men who would dare to undertake the kind of work that was considered as the work for the women; likewise the men would ridicule the women.

The women could do just as much work as men but their maxim was, "Men for war and hunting; while home is the place for women and their chief duty is housework."

#### Courtship

Much has been said about the wedding of the ancient Choctaws. There is not much difference in the stories I used to be told as to how they got acquainted, made friends, then the courtship. While the young beau is still small and under the care of his parents, a mare and a colt, a cow and a calf, and a sow and pigs were given the boy and, if a girl, the same number of animals were given her, as well as a few quilts, dishes and chickens.

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These gifts were given to each child at birth, providing the parents were able to make such gifts. The increase from this stock or chickens would in no way be disposed of nor be given away, but was the property of the child as long as he or she lived with the parents. When he or she, as the case may be, became grown, the whole amount was given to them so that when a young man or woman married, usually the couple started out in life with sufficient stock, if nothing more.

When the young brave went the first time to see his "future bride," after deciding to have a wife, after trying himself out as to how to make the approach, he would walk into the room where she might happen to be seated with the rest of the family, (usually at a public gathering) and during the conversation, he sought and soon found an opportunity to toss a gravel or pebble at her while the other members of the family were not paying attention. The "fair one" soon ascertained the source the pebble came from and fully comprehended the significance of those little messengers of love. If she approved she returned the

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pebbles slyly and silently as they came and sometimes a little smile was added with the pebble messenger as it was tossed back to the young brave. If she disapproved she suddenly sprang from her seat, turned a frowned face of disapproval upon him and silently left the room, which act signified that everything was off. This usually ended the matter of matrimony though not a word had been spoken between them.

In the event the pebble was tossed back by the maid to the young brave he joyfully left for the door with "Eya-li" (I go) and the parents usually responded in the informal "Omih" (very well). This assent was given by father or mother.

The young brave would return in a few days with a few presents for the parents of the girl and to secure their approval. If accepted by them a feast was prepared and friends were invited. When all were assembled on the day set, the groom was placed in one room and the bride in another and the doors closed. A distance of two or three hundred feet was measured off and at the

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farther end a post was set up, and at the given signal, the door of the bride's room was thrown open and at once the bride jumped out and started for the pole with the lightness and swiftness of a deer. When she had gotten a few rods ahead, or enough start to keep from being caught, if she was so inclined, the door of the groom's room was thrown open and out he came with swiftness to overtake the girl if possible before she reached the goal, much to the amusement of the spectators.

Very often to try the sincerity of his affection, the girl did not let him overtake her until she was only a few feet from the goal, when the young brave would catch up with her. The sisters of the groom would then carry the bride back to the house. Sometimes if she had changed her mind in regard to marrying the man or had some other man in view after public acknowledgment to the groom, she did not let him overtake her in the race since she was fleet of foot herself, which was an acknowledgment to the public that there would be no marriage, but such a result seldom happened.

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After the bride was brought back to the house she was seated on a blanket or buffalo hide spread on the ground and a circle of women immediately formed around her. Various kinds of presents were bestowed upon her.

After the gifts, and dinner prepared for the occasion, when they were pronounced man and wife, they all returned to their respective homes with happy and merry hearts.

After the ceremony and the festival, the young couple built a log house, trees being abundant for this purpose, on a certain selected spot of ground most convenient. They fenced off a few acres of land, and cleared it for planting of corn, beans, potatoes and other necessities of life. They resided at this new home which was exclusively their rights and were strictly respected by all. If the brave became dissatisfied and wished to move to another place, then his claim was forfeited and another family took possession of the place, providing that the improvements were first paid for. This was the way the Choctaws of the olden days lived, prospered, and enjoyed a good time.

Note: ( The wording of the manuscripts of Pete Cole, Choctaw Indian, is not changed. Ed. )